

**THREE POEMS BY
KATHLEEN McCracken**

Note to Chris

The skeleton in my closet
jostles her bones together,
offers her sister-skin
for your night-light.

A rictus floats
in the kitchen mirror.
Framed in a wimple
of discontent
I recognise the familiar
violet irises.

Like Kafka's
hunger artist
I am insatiable, rapacious
but simply cannot
find the right food,
saintlike keep waiting
for a voice to say
'you have fasted
long enough and are
forgiven'

It is dark here.
Cloistered with the abandoned
nests of night-birds
I write to you
letters from the damp

pit of a well
whose waters will not sluice,
an earth-worked
stone turret
where ropes and buckets
drop but never
return.

Still there are days
when light
surfaces like a blue
sail on blue water,
a fin or a scythe
sweeping shoreward it

promises to bind and tie
the disfiguring
fingers of time.

Merseyside

The women of Mersey
are fleshly sweet with scents
of streetsmoke
caught in the moving net
of half past four
blue morning

Their men have eyes
that rattle dark as agates
in a jar

Their children

glint like codfish
in a basket

The widows of Merseyside
sit by windows,
beating on a skin drum
watching for ships
on a paper sea

White

On the table
a red geranium.
Smell of earth and mildew
the strange leaf-scent
of old houses.

She sits by the window
watching this last snowfall
in April.
Her hands tat
a landscape of white lace,
habit of knotting things
firmly together.

The hardy geranium impresses
itself
on another day.
The silver shuttle
sings and goes still.

Outside the snow falls
into its own light

HEATHER SPEARS

Sauna*

So warm in here I lie low;
one arm at rest up the grainy wood
reaches into deliberate, real heat
where my fingers smoke like candles.
Tough, you're grinning, up in the thick
of it,
legs swinging off the platform,
blurred demon. From your body
sweat leaks, runs down in big, loose
drops
that spread along my sides
warm as let wounds.

Infernal surgeon, you're untouchable
in the cowl of sulphurous heat —

and I want to slide somehow out of
myself
romantically rise
to you through its intensifying,
into imagined cruelty,
your eyeballs burning and surely burning
lungs and viscerals, where we could be
fire swallows, my mouth finally
blistered to your mouth,
where you might even begin
to peel off sections of your basted skin,
and lay them sizzling across me.

Arm, belly, breast, why
you'd be my armour then, your tactile
harm
closing around me, I can smell incisions,
flesh going up in steam,
in sweetness, like god food,
prophecy —

no good. You'll have to come down.
Closeup, your eyes lose focus, the lines
around your mouth define some
region I have not yet travelled on;

you're soaking, as if you were
turned inside out.
Nothing deified here. This kind of light
is only found
internally, its scope
is the scarred heart's wet, moving
chambers,
looked at not with proper wonder
but pryingly, by the wrong eyes.

* **Editor's Note:** When we first published
this poem in our "Nordic Women" issue
(Vol. 9, No. 2), p. 110, we omitted the last
8 lines. The poem appears here in its
entirety. Our apologies to the author.